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ABSTRACT

Young children's experiences in being read to are often the first in a chain of events leading to the acquisition of reading skills and a love for reading. When asked to write accounts of their early memories related to literature, 75 students in university-level children's literature courses mentioned their mothers more frequently than any other individuals (47 respondents), followed by teachers (34 respondents), fathers (8 respondents), and other persons. Among other findings were that every student except one recalled pleasant memories in their early experiences with literature, that Mother Goose was by far the most popular form of poetry remembered, and that a wide range of books was recalled as favorites. Students' comments suggested the pleasure that being read to in early childhood had brought them. Although students recalled experiences with their mothers most frequently, the teacher's role in reading to children is extremely important. Studies show that primary teachers read aloud regularly to their pupils but that this practice is not as common in middle grades; yet reading aloud to middle grade children is also quite important. It is also important for parents and teachers to cooperate to provide children with good reading experiences and for them to become aware of the importance of the cycle in which enthusiastic adults share literature with children. (GT)

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DID YOU CREATE MEMORIES TODAY?

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DID YOU CREATE MEMORIES TODAY?

Where did you acquire your love for reading? What incidents and events result in a desire for learning to read, and thus finding pleasure in reading? Perhaps you are finding your thoughts traveling through many years, back to your earliest memories of childhood. More than likely in searching through those thoughts, there are pleasant moments recalling stories read or told, nursery rhymes cited and any one of numerous other listening - reading experiences. These events may have taken place when you were very young, before you started to school, or even during your early school years. Most important is recalling the special person or persons who shared these experiences and provided, first hand, your introduction and further opportunities to enjoy the world of reading and books. No matter how brief the introduction, the chain of events has begun, which consequently, results in the acquisition of the skills necessary for effective reading. Recalling the identity of the person or persons in your early memories might reveal an important discovery--the love for reading perpetuated by those who share their excitement and enthusiasm with children. In years to come, these experiences provide pleasant memories for adults who possess a love for reading. Thus, a cycle evolves.

Although readings and research studies seem to support the importance of early reading experiences for children, the author's interest and curiosity have prompted the conducting of some informal studies among the students in her children's literature courses. Each semester, students are asked to write an account of their early memories involving persons who shared stories, books, rhymes, or other activities related to children's literature. This paper is the first assignment in the course. Very little discussion takes place regarding the assignment and ideally the introduction to the course follows after the papers have been collected. Students are asked to rely on their own experiences recalled from their memories. Papers usually vary from one - half page to two pages in length.

During the academic year 1979, four University classes in Children's Literature were asked to write accounts of their early memories. The graduate classes consisted of forty-five students, thirty-nine of who were full-time elementary teachers, one full-time elementary graduate student, one elementary librarian, and four part-time students (all previous elementary teachers). Thirty students were enrolled in the undergraduate classes, all pre-service teachers in elementary education. In recalling their early memories these seventy-five students mentioned their mothers the most frequently. In fact, forty-seven persons told of pleasant experiences they had shared with their mothers. Teachers were mentioned thirty-four times; all were pleasant experiences except one. Most students told of more than one person sharing stories

and poems with them. Other special people and the number of times mentioned were the father(eight), grandfather (two), aunt (two), brother (two), sister (four), grandmother (two), and librarian (one). All students mentioned at least one person who was important in sharing stories and poetry during their early years.

Every student except one recalled pleasant memories in their early experiences with literature. Most of the seventy-five students told about preschool experiences where stories were read aloud and poems were recited. Preschool memories most often included Mother Goose and Folktales. Twenty students reported the importance of Bible stories at preschool and school age levels. Stories reported were more likely to have been read from books, but five students specifically remembered being told stories. Mother Goose was, by far, the most popular form of poetry remembered at all ages, and many of the common titles were mentioned. Poetry, including poems from Mother Goose, Eugene Field, and Robert Louis Stevenson, was mentioned by twenty-eight students.

Folktale titles which were the most frequently reported were "Jack and the Bean Stalk, Little Red Riding Hood, The Three Bears, Ginger bread Boy, Cinderella, Thumbelina, and The Three Pigs". Two students mentioned fables, one in particular, "The Tortoise and the Hare". The most surprising results were the titles of books, The Five Little Peppers, Peter Rabbit, The Tree in the Trail, Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, Child's Garden

of Verses, Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, The Biggest Bear, Secret Garden, Little House in the Big Woods and other Laura Ingalls Wilder Books, and Little Women. Other books mentioned were Lassie Come Home, Nancy Drew Mysteries, Uncle Wiggly, Black Beauty, and Raggedy Ann and Andy. One student recalled a set of Children's Encyclopedias, and how she read and reread the first two volumes.

The papers contained some interesting comments relating to early memories. A few of these quotes are quite noteworthy:

"Although other memories are vague at this point being read to is quite vivid in my mind."

"Mother derived great pleasure from reading to her 'brood'."

"I was fortunate to have had some imaginative and talented primary teachers."

"Most of my childhood memories dealing with literature and books in general are very pleasant, however, I shall always be indebted to my beloved grandmother for my fondest memory"

"On cold winter nights I would sit on my dad's lap in front of the fire. He would read to me ..."

"I do believe, however, that pleasurable experiences with nursery rhymes and stories somehow helped me to know that there is pleasure, adventure, challenge, information, inspiration, and fulfillment in books."

"... she could make stories come alive. She always told them with great admiration. She always looked us in the eyes. She enjoyed telling as much as we enjoyed listening."

"Mother read my favorite books aloud to me until they were so familiar that I would catch her if she skipped a word ... The next greatest contribution to encouraging my enjoyment of books was made by my fourth grade teacher. Each day she would read aloud a chapter from one of the Laura Ingalls Wilder books."

"Occasionally I like to visit her and take these books from the shelf and remember a part of my childhood. I know this early experience is one of the reason I love to read."

"Every night at bedtime my mother would read to me." "Before I was school age, my mother would read a story to me at afternoon nap time."

"I just couldn't believe it when I realized I was reading poetry! Ugh! I hated poetry! Had I not listened and loved that book when I was younger, I would have quit immediately, but since mother had read it to me, I enjoyed it. All I can remember is the astonishment I felt when I realized my mother had sneaked poems in on us!"

"Mother's readings could make me smell that pie, taste its sweetness and even see the sweet oozing syrup."

"It is so sad that my regular teacher did not share those rich experiences with us. ...she robbed us of the true beauty of language, she did not share the nursery songs and rhymes and I really regret that."

"Although many years have passed since those stories were told to me, they are just as vivid in my mind today as they were then."

Some important aspects of the courses in Children's Literature include emphasis on the relationships between children's early experiences with literature and their attitudes toward reading, and for teachers, preservice and inservice, recognition that children's success in reading is greatly influenced by their early experiences with literature.

Even though, students tended to recall their experiences with their mothers most frequently, this does not make the teacher's role any less important. On the contrary, when children come to school, the teacher becomes one of the most significant persons in their lives. Some children have not had the opportunity to share pleasant experiences related to stories and books. Teachers must provide these experiences. Research done by Cullinan, Aggar, and Strickland (1974) reveals some encouraging results. Primary teachers accept the idea that they should read aloud to their children at least once a day, and seem to be practicing what they believe.

Studies conducted in middle grades show that reading aloud to children is not as common as in primary grades (Huck, 1979). Less than forty percent of the middle grade teachers read aloud to their students once a day (Tom, 1969). In

view of the fact that many middle grade students cannot read on their own, reading aloud becomes even more important. According to Huck (1979) the two most important motivating factors in helping children become readers are:

1. Time for reading books of their choosing.
2. Hearing good books read aloud by an enthusiastic teacher. (p.708)

In his acceptance speech for The Caldecott Medal, Robert Lawson, noted author and illustrator, talked about the importance of parents and teachers cooperating to provide children with good reading experiences (Coody, 1979). He gives his own life as an example, "My parents are concerned about my education and well being, and they are all in agreement about what is best for me." Coody (1979) suggests the most natural means of creating a bond of cooperation between home and school is "a dynamic program of children's literature, with good books circulating among children, their parents and their teachers (p.176)." The types of books for children's reading is suggested by Lawson as reported by Coody.

"Books that will become tattered and grimy from use, not books too handsome to grovel with. Books that will make them weep, books that will rack them with hearty laughter. Books that absorb them so that they have to be shakened loose from them. Books that they will put under the pillows at night. Books that will give them gooseflesh and glimpses of glory. (p. 284) "

Perhaps the cycle of enthusiastic adults sharing books, stories and poetry with children has become a tradition, but

to further ensure its endurance, the process needs to be revitalized and acknowledged periodically. Revitalization occurs when parents and teachers become aware of the importance of the cycle. Acknowledgment, thus is concurrent, for all they need is to recall those pleasant times in childhood when someone shared a poem or a story. A memory was formed which was the beginning of many more enjoyable experiences found through reading.

Teachers are in a unique position, for fortunately, they have the opportunity to provide enriching experiences for children who already possess a wealth of knowledge in stories and rhymes. On the other hand, they may be filling gaps or providing the only experiences some children have ever known involving literature. Regardless, teachers provide children with those special moments which are cherished throughout the lives of the individuals.

In Gillilan's poem "The Reading Mother" he seems to express the thoughts of gratitude of individuals who enjoy reading--

"You may have tangible wealth untold;
Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold.
Richer than I you can never be---
I had a mother who read to me (p. 376).
(Felleman, 1936).

Even more fortunate is the child who can express with delight,
"I had a mother and teacher who read to me."

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